



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Cecilia Malmström

EU Commissioner for Home Affairs

Fighting corruption: From intentions to results

Check Against Delivery
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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues and friends. Good morning

I am very pleased to be here today, and I want to thank you all for coming to this workshop on corruption. It is especially nice to be here in Göteborg, my hometown, and to see former colleagues from the University here. Professor Bo Rothstein taught me about good governance and the importance of trust already many years ago in the department of political science.

This will be a long and full day. My colleagues and I will explain to you how the Commission is preparing the first EU Anti-Corruption Report and we will listen and collect information from you about anti-corruption policies in the Member States.

Your input will be very useful for the Commission. We need your expertise to carry out a fair and intelligent assessment of the 'hottest' issues in this area.

So, why is anti-corruption policy a top priority for the Commission today?

Well, corruption is a phenomenon which is difficult to tackle, and at the same time a problem we cannot afford to ignore.

Academic research has shown how severely corruption can affect the economy and society at large. It erodes trust in public institutions and political processes, and undermines the healthy functioning of markets and competition. It negatively affects already tight public budgets, and helps organised crime groups do their dirty work.

And the scale of the problem is serious. The Commission's best estimate is that 120 billion euros are lost each year to corruption in the 27 Member States of the EU. That is the equivalent of the whole EU-budget. In public procurement, studies suggest that up to 20- 25% of the public contracts' value may be lost to corruption.

I imagine that none of this is news to you. Civil society, international organisations - like the Council of Europe and the OECD - media and other stakeholders have stressed, again and again, the importance of preventing and prosecuting corruption.

In recent years, the financial crisis put stronger focus on making sure that taxpayers' money is not wasted through corruption or other financial mismanagement.

Still, deep-rooted corruption is a part of reality in many countries. Although the EU is probably rightly perceived to be one of the cleaner parts of the world, corruption is also present here. There have even been several serious cases here in Göteborg. It varies in nature and extent from one Member State to the other, but it affects all of us.

European citizens are fully aware, and concerned, about this. In February last year the Commission published a special Eurobarometer survey on European citizens' attitudes towards corruption: three out of four EU citizens see corruption as a major problem in their country. Almost half of all Europeans believe that the level of corruption in their country increased in the past three years.

It is, therefore, not a surprise that fighting corruption has become a priority for many politicians, both at EU and national level in recent years. However, there is still a long way from declared intentions to concrete results.

What is missing to address corruption effectively in the EU? What is the Commission proposing to do?

Our analysis is that Member States have, broadly speaking, set up the necessary legal instruments and institutions responsible for prevention and fight against corruption.

However, the results they deliver are not satisfactory across the EU: anti-corruption rules are not vigorously enforced and one does not find many strong examples of how systemic problems related to corruption are effectively tackled.

The Commission therefore wants to focus on concrete actions, and stimulate political will to implement them from the global to the local level. We want to engage in a dialogue with Member States, offering suggestions and support.

We do not see new EU legislation on corruption as the way forward at this stage.

That is the thinking behind the political initiative the Commission took in June 2011 when, for the first time since 2003, it adopted a general Communication on corruption in the EU.

The Communication did essentially two things:

- It set up the EU Anti-Corruption Report. A report that the Commission will publish every two years, looking at trends in corruption in the EU and at how Member States' address it.
- It made the Commission focus more on corruption in all related, internal and external, EU policy fields. At the same time, it pleaded for closer cooperation with existing European and international anti-corruption monitoring mechanisms.

Yet another Report some may say. What real impact can it have?

Well, outspoken, fair reports based on facts can make a difference. They can, to some extent, stimulate political commitment to fight corruption more vigorously.

That is, in fact, the main objective of the EU Anti-corruption Report: to push for stronger engagement, at all political levels in the Member States, to tackle corruption effectively.

The assessment and recommendations in the Report will hopefully provide everyone - politicians, the general public, media, and experts such as you - with a useful benchmark for taking national corruption policy forward, and help promote good practices across the board.

At the same time, I hope that the Report will help increase trust among Member States - trust without which the whole European project may ultimately be at risk. In a mid-term perspective, it may even contribute to the international credibility of the Union as a whole. The EU, which sees itself in a global context as a champion of good governance and anti-corruption would be more credible by looking thoroughly at problems at home instead of just point fingers at others.

What will the report look like?

My colleagues from DG HOME will explain to you a little later today how we plan to develop the EU Anti-Corruption Report.

The idea is that it will have four parts. First, a part on overall trends in corruption across the EU. Second, a part on a selected issue of particular relevance at EU level (such as corruption in public procurement), a third part with country chapters analysing a limited number of selected issues specific to each Member State and a forth part focussing on anti-corruption policies in EU institutions.

The Commission will address specific recommendations to each Member State, whilst pointing to success stories which might inspire other countries.

Let me reassure you that we do not want to reinvent the wheel, or impose new burden on national administrations when we prepare the report. There will be no new questionnaires for Member States administration's to fill out. We will instead use available information from existing monitoring mechanisms (GRECO, OECD, UNCAC), together with data available from other sources, like civil society, independent experts, researchers, networks, specialised institutions/agencies and – of course – information collected at today's workshop.

Corruption in the EU institutions

Let me finish by saying a few words on corruption in the EU's own institutions. I recognise that corruption within the European Commission and other EU Institutions is an issue we have to take seriously. Recent cases of alleged corruption - in the European Commission and in the European Parliament – remind us not to rest on our laurels.

Fortunately, OLAF and the European Court of Auditors have proven their usefulness in revealing such cases. The Commission has revised its code of conduct for commissioners to reinforce the integrity standards. The European Parliament has also reinforced the ethical code for MEPs.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Commission is committed to drive EU anti-corruption policy forward, in close collaboration with Member States and other stakeholders.

The main instrument for that drive is the EU Anti-Corruption Report which will be published for the first time this year.

A lot of work is ahead of us to produce that report, at the required level of quality, covering the situation in all Member States. I hope to be able to count on you, both government and non-governmental actors, to join us in that effort and support the creation of a stronger EU anti-corruption policy.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you a fruitful day in the various workshops, and look forward to seeing the results of your discussions.